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ABSTRACT

The Texas legislature and the State Board of Education, recognizing the need for an alternative to student retention, established the Retention Reduction Pilot Program to provide additional days of instruction for students in first grade who would otherwise have been retained. The Optional Extended Year Program (OEYP) was initiated to expand provisions for an optional extended year to students in kindergarten through grade 8. Since the Austin Independent School District (AISD) had participated in the pilot program, they were eligible for OEYP funding. This report describes and evaluates services through the OEYP program in the 1995-96 and 1996-97 school years. Funding was merged for the 2 years because districts received the initial allocation late in the 1995-96 school year. Most of the schools (25 elementary schools and 11 to 14 middle schools) used OEYP funds for summer programs, although some extended the school day or the school week. After participation in the OEYP, fewer than 1% of the students were retained. An examination of scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) indicated that the different programs were successful to varying degrees. TAAS reading scores for students who participated in intersession programs (intersessions for year-round schools) were generally higher, but mathematics scores were similar for the extended day programs and summer schools. Regardless of the type of program or subject, the OEYP achieved its greatest effects on TAAS scores at grade 6. (Contains eight figures.) (SLD)

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FEEDBACK

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Optional Extended Year Program

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FEEDBACK

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Austin Independent School District
OPTIONAL EXTENDED YEAR PROGRAM

The Texas Legislature and the State Board of Education recognize the need for an alternative to student retention. From 1993-1995, the Retention Reduction Pilot Program was authorized to provide additional days of instruction for students in first grade who would otherwise have been retained. The Austin Independent School District (AISD) was one of 53 school districts to participate in this pilot program. The success of the Retention Reduction Program led to greater support for such initiatives in the Texas legislature.

The Optional Extended Year Program (OEYP) was initiated in 1995 as a result of Senate Bill 1. Passage of this bill expanded the provisions for an optional extended year program for students in kindergarten through grade 8. These non-competitive grant funds were awarded to Texas public school districts with high concentrations of educationally disadvantaged students. The funds were allocated to enable participating school districts to provide a maximum of 30 additional days of accelerated instruction for students in kindergarten through grade 8. Since AISD had participated in the original retention reduction grant award, the district was automatically eligible for funding under the Optional Extended Year Program.

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

AISD received its initial OEYP allocation in late April 1996 and began implementation of the program during summer 1996. The 36 schools participating in the 1996 summer school program served 2,152 students. During the 1996-97 school year, 5,743 students participated in optional extended year activities at 56 campuses throughout the district. This figure represents students who were served under two separate allocations, 1995-96 and 1996-97. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) allowed the funds to be merged because districts received the initial allocation too late in the 1995-96 school year for full implementation of the program.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

The primary focus of the Optional Extended Year Program is to immediately reduce and ultimately eliminate student retention. Schools participating in the OEYP could provide an instructional program to extend the year (intersessions for year-round schools or summer school for regular calendar schools), the week, or the day. Extended day programs were required to be implemented beyond the regular seven-hour day and could not include tutorials or extended day-care services available at the school. Table 1 contains information on the number of schools in AISD that followed each of the OEYP configurations. It can be seen that the majority of schools chose to use their optional extended year funds to provide summer programs for their students.

Table 1: Number of AISD Schools Participating in Optional Extended Year Activities

	Summer 1996	Day 1996-97	Week 1996-97	Year-Round 1996-97	Summer 1997
ELEMENTARY	25	8	1	11	25
MIDDLE SCHOOL	11	1	2	1	14

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School districts that received optional extended year funds were encouraged to use innovative strategies in the implementation of their programs. According to principals and teachers at participating AISD schools, the primary strategies used in providing services to their at-risk students participating in the Optional Extended Year Program included the following:

- hands-on activities;
- cooperative learning styles;
- Project Read; and
- Reading Recovery strategies for small group instruction.

In addition to the use of innovative strategies, districts were required to incorporate parent/family activities into their programs. In AISD, principals reported that parent involvement was encouraged using the following approaches:

- parent conferences;
- materials and meetings provided in the home language of the parents;
- home visits;
- requests for parent volunteers (e.g., in the classroom , library, or cafeteria); and
- parent surveys.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Several variables were considered in evaluating the effectiveness of the Optional Extended Year Program. Districts that receive OEYP funds are required to promote to the next grade level a student who attends at least 90% of the program days unless the student's parent or guardian requests in writing that the student be retained. Table 2 contains information on the number of OEYP students who were promoted or retained during the 1995-96 and 1996-97 school years. It can be seen that fewer than 1% of the students were retained in either school year (23 in 1995-96 and 38 in 1996-97). This indicates that the overwhelming majority of students attended at least 90% of the program days.

Table 2: Number of OEYP Students Promoted/Retained by Grade
1995-96 through 1996-97

	1995-96		1996-97	
Grade	Promoted	Retained	Promoted	Retained
K	359	1	261	1
1	655	7	819	18
2	689	7	635	10
3	595	6	581	1
4	469	2	528	5
5	156	0	359	3
6	192	0	286	0
7	332	0	329	0
8	267	0	322	0
Total	3714	23	4120	38

Program Comparisons

TEA required each district that received OEYP funds to report basic demographic information about the students who participated in program activities, along with information on

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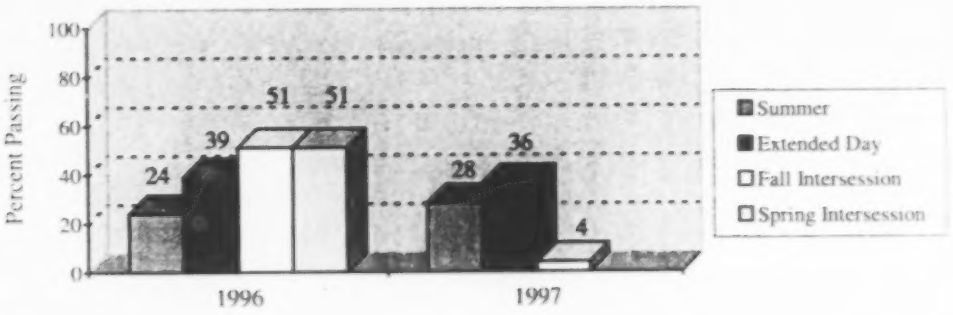
the numbers of students who were retained or promoted as a result of their participation. In addition, AISD examined achievement data for its program participants. Although the majority of schools used their OEYP funds to provide extended year activities for their students, there were enough students at most grade levels who participated in extended day and week activities to make comparisons across programs possible. TAAS data were examined for all OEYP participants who were in grades 3-7 in school year 1995-96, prior to their involvement in programs funded under the optional extended year grant. These same students' scores were then examined for the 1996-97 school year when they were in grades 4-8, respectively, after participation in OEYP activities to see the effect of program participation on mastery of TAAS. Figures 1 through 8 contain information on TAAS percent passing by grade, subject, and type of OEYP program. Configurations containing fewer than five students are not included in the analyses. This is the reason that few scores are reported for optional extended week programs.

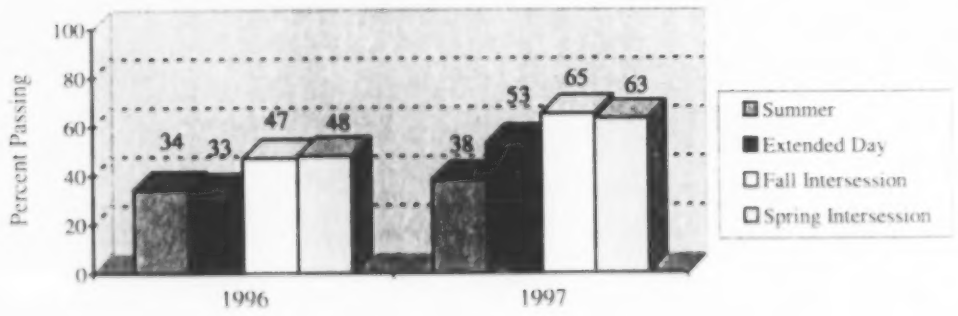
Reading and mathematics scores are not reported for students who were in grade 3 in 1995-96. Grade 3 students who participated in summer programs during their fourth –grade year were the only group that had large enough numbers to be reported for both years of interest, so no cross-program comparisons were possible.

Figure 1: Percentage of Students Who Passed Grade 4 TAAS Reading in 1996 and Grade 5 TAAS Reading in 1997 (Matched Scores)



Note: There were not enough spring 1997 intersession or optional extended week students in either year to report.

Figure 2: Percentage of Students Who Passed Grade 5 TAAS Reading in 1996 and Grade 6 TAAS Reading in 1997 (Matched Scores)



Note: There were not enough optional extended week students in either year to report.

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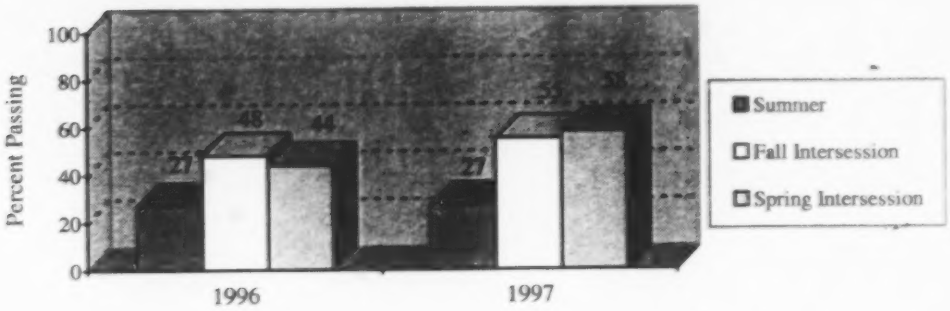
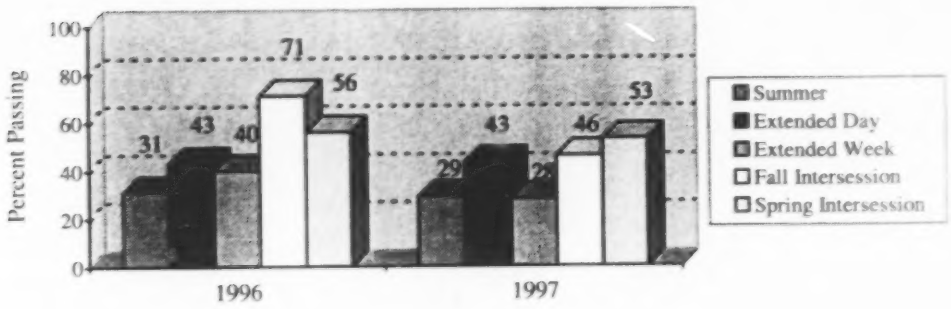
Figure 3: Percentage of Students Who Passed Grade 6 TAAS Reading in 1996 and Grade 7 TAAS Reading in 1997 (Matched Scores)



Note: There were not enough optional extended day or week students in either year to report.

Figure 4: Percentage of Students Who Passed Grade 7 TAAS Reading in 1996 and Grade 8 TAAS Reading in 1997 (Matched Scores)



Examination of Figures 1-4 indicates that students who participated in the intersessions achieved the highest overall mastery rates on TAAS Reading when compared to participants in the other optional extended year programs. However, in terms of gains from 1995-96 to 1996-97, students who participated in the optional extended day program at grade 6 achieved the greatest increase in average percent passing scores on TAAS reading (20 point gain). In general, the summer programs produced modest gains across grades in reading. While the March intersession produced high gains at grades 6 and 7 (15 points and 14 points, respectively), the dramatic loss at grade 5 reading (over a 50% lower passing rate) is of concern. A similar decline was noted at grade 5 reading for students who participated in the November intersession.

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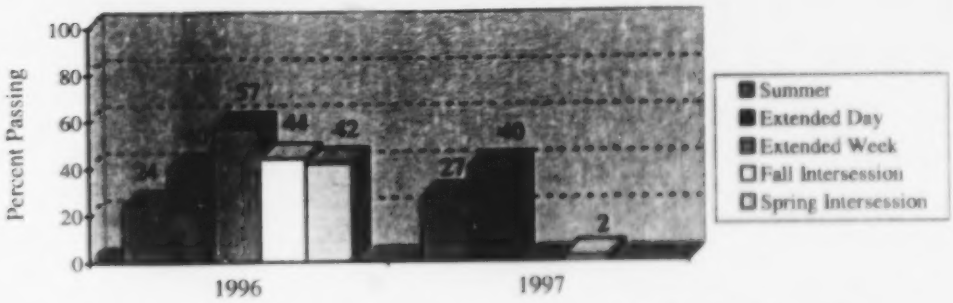
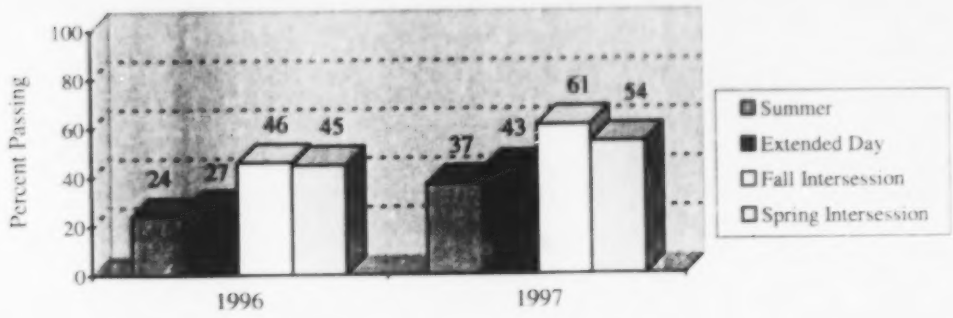
Figure 5: Percentage of Students Who Passed Grade 4 TAAS Mathematics in 1996 and Grade 5 TAAS Mathematics in 1997 (Matched Scores)



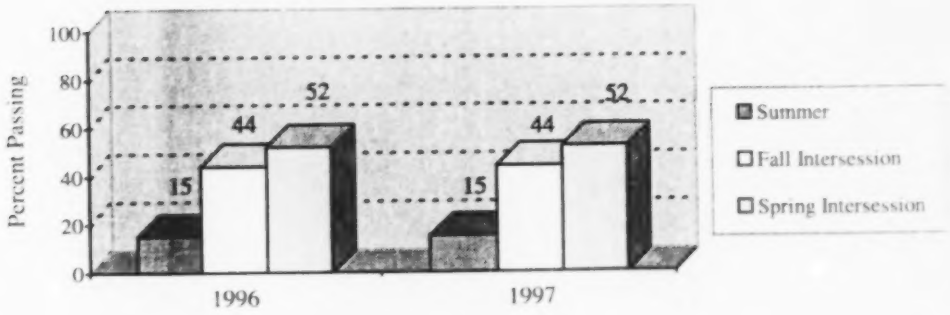
Note: There were not enough spring intersession or optional extended week students in 1997 to report.

Figure 6: Percentage of Students Who Passed Grade 5 TAAS Mathematics in 1996 and Grade 6 TAAS Mathematics in 1997 (Matched Scores)



Note: There were not enough optional extended week students in either year to report.

Figure 7: Percentage of Students Who Passed Grade 6 TAAS Mathematics in 1996 and Grade 7 TAAS Mathematics in 1997 (Matched Scores)



Note: There were not enough optional extended day or week students in either year to report.

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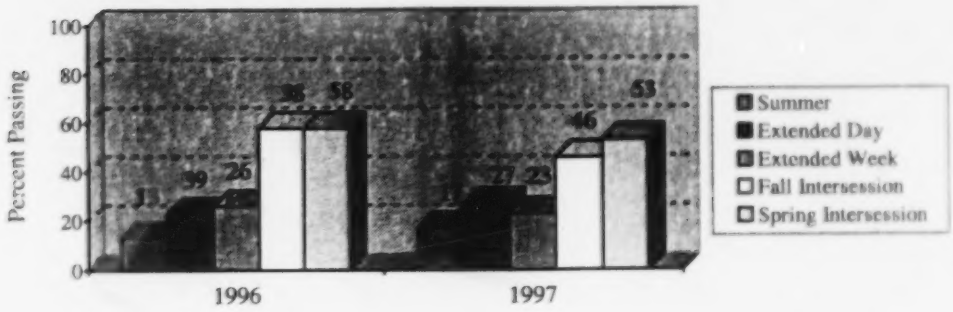
Figure 8: Percentage of Students Who Passed Grade 7 TAAS Mathematics in 1996 and Grade 8 TAAS Mathematics in 1997 (Matched Scores)



According to Figures 5-8, students participating in the OEYP-funded summer school activities showed gains at all grade levels in TAAS mathematics; the same is true for students who participated in extended day programs. Gains for both programs were greatest at grade 6 (13-point gain for summer program participants and 16-point gain for extended day participants). Students who participated in extended week activities did not report gains at any grade level. However, it should be noted that there were few grades at which extended week data were reported. November and March intersession participants achieved gains in TAAS mathematics at grade 6 only.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

After participation in the Optional Extended Year Program, fewer than 1% of the students were retained. When TAAS scores were examined for students who participated in the various optional extended year programs that were offered in AISD, it would appear that the different programs were successful to varying degrees. The TAAS reading scores for students who participated in the interessions were generally higher than were the scores for students in the other types of programs, but the most dramatic gains in reading were achieved by students participating in the optional extended day program at grade 6. For TAAS mathematics, both the extended day program and the summer activities produced score gains. Regardless of the type of program or the subject, the OEYP achieved the greatest effects on TAAS scores at grade 6.

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